

Historic, archived document

Do not assume content reflects current
scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Thursday, April 30, 1936

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "CHOICES FOR SWEETENING." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, United States Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

How is your sweet tooth today, listeners? Are you in the mood for discussing our various national sweets?

In the sugar-maple country the sap-flow has stopped and the boiling-room is idle once more. The jobs now are canning or bottling the sirup, and packaging the sugar for market. Summer tourists will soon be buying these sweets from roadside markets and shops. Much of this year's maple output will be finding its way to the dinner table along with hot cakes and waffles or as flavor in desserts. Much more of it will appear next fall and winter especially when Christmas cakes and candies come along.

But before that time, the sugar cane and sorghum will be harvested, the honey crop collected, and the year's yield of cane sirup, sorgho sirup, corn sirup and honey will be on the markets, too. These are the sources of the various sweets that we Americans consume in such extraordinary quantities. Perhaps you know that the statisticians say we use far more sugar than any other people in the world.

In the United States the maple flavor is probably the most prized of all the sugar flavors -- a sort of inherited preference, perhaps, because this is our only purely American sweet. Maple sap was the principal source of sugar for the early American settlers and for the Indians before them. It held its own with honey as a competitor until cane sugar came along. Then came beet sugar. And meantime sorghum was very much in the picture. Today we have a considerable variety of sweetenings to choose from with a considerable range of prices. But maple sugar and honey now belong in the class of luxury sweets in many parts of the country. And cane and beet sugars are far in the lead of other sweets as far as quantity is concerned.

The maple-sugar industry you might describe as a "side issue" of farming. The "sugar bush" or grove of sugar-maple trees is a natural growth of our native hard maple trees. The farmer who has such a grove gathers the sap in the early spring when he can do little other work on the farm. He boils down the sap and either bottles or cans it for his own customers, or sells it in great galvanized drums to buyers. The buyers reprocess the sirup and some of it goes into the retail trade. More than half of it they boil down to sugar and sell to tobacco manufacturers for flavoring cigarettes.

The cost and labor of producing sirup is high because it takes 50 gallons of sap to make 1 gallon of maple sirup.

Because maple sirup comes from many small producers, different lots vary in color and flavor, and the buyer blends them to standardize his commodity for the market. The important maple States have cooperated with the United States Department of Agriculture and set up standards of quality. Most of the maple sirup now on the market is graded and labeled accordingly. Sirups that are flavored with maple rather than made entirely from maple sap must sell with labels that announce this fact. Usually these maple-flavored sirups are white-sugar sirup with perhaps 25 percent maple sirup.

Of the sugar-cane products, brown sugar and cane sirup are less common on the markets than white sugar and molasses. The industry is geared for large scale production of white sugar, and molasses is a by-product. It is the "mother liquor" out of which the sugar crystals have come. Molasses contains all the food values of the cane, and also the strong, sharp flavor which is due partly to the natural acid. Molasses not only has the sweetness of the cane but it also has its iron and calcium. Of course, these values are lacking in the white refined sugar. As for cane sirup, this is the whole juice boiled down and clarified. It retains all the mineral values as well as the full flavor of the sugar cane. Since the big sugar mills and refineries are concerned chiefly with refined sugar, the making of whole-cane sirup is carried on by the small farmer or in small plants in our southern cane-growing States. Cane sirup is on the markets generally. And because of its flavor, many commercial sirup mixtures contain it.

As for brown sugar, that is cane sugar partially refined. It retains the full flavor and much of the mineral values of the juice of the cane.

Sorghum or sorgo sirup is thick and about the color of table molasses. It comes from the sweet sorghum plant which grows throughout the northern part of our southern States, northward through southern Indiana and Illinois and westward. In the sorghum belt, sorgo sirup takes the place of molasses and often goes by the name of "sorghum molasses." The food value of sorghum or sorgo sirup is if anything a little higher than that of cane sirup or molasses. Last year's sorghum crop was a big one, and as the market widens beyond the "sorghum belt" more and more people are finding this a delicious sirup for cookies, candies and breads.

Sugar cane and sugar beets both make white sugar. Sugar cane is native to India and since very ancient times people have prized it for its juice. Now great sugar plantations on both sides of the equator all around the globe produce cane sugar, huge plants refine it, and ships carry it to all civilized nations as one of the chief articles of commerce.

Beet sugar is of more recent date. About the middle of the 18th Century a scientist in Austria found he could produce sugar from beets. Later when Napoleon's army cut off cane sugar supplies from northern Europe, beet sugar met the emergency and came into its own commercially. Now, thanks to successful plant breeding and highly developed methods of beet cultivation, the beet crops yield 3 or 4 times as much sugar as the beets originally tested, and the beet sugar industry flourishes in the temperate zone both in the United States and Europe. The refined sugar from beets and from cane is identical in flavor and serves the same purpose in cookery.

